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TAGS: PREL GM PL

SUBJECT: VISIT OF POLISH PRESIDENT KACZYNSKI TO GERMANY

Classified By: POL M/C JOHN BAUMAN for reasons 1.4(B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: During his visit to Berlin on March 8-9, Polish President Kaczynski criticized German positions on the EU, the German-Russian gas pipeline and the commemoration of World War II refugees. However, his public remarks were relatively restrained, and German officials described the atmosphere of meetings he held with President Koehler, Chancellor Merkel, and Foreign Minister Steinmeier as good. While little progress was made in narrowing policy differences, the improved personal chemistry between Kaczynski and Chancellor Merkel was viewed by the Germans as progress. The Polish president's tone was a bit more combative in newspaper interviews, and many German commentators highlighted differences between German and Polish political culture. (End Summary)

Speech on the EU

¶2. (C) In a speech delivered at Berlin's Humboldt University, Kaczynski outlined his views on the EU in some detail. He said the EU is composed of 25, soon to be 27, very different countries, and a more fully integrated EU federal state is at least 20 years in the future. Europe simply is not ready for the federal state proposed in the EU constitution, he argued. For the time being the EU should focus on expansion (Kaczynski advocated membership for Ukraine, Turkey and Georgia) and modest concrete goals such as creating a European intervention force or ensuring energy security. Kaczynski stressed that Poland only regained its independence in 1989, which makes him reluctant to surrender more of Poland's sovereignty to the EU at this time.

Meetings with Government Officials

¶3. (C) According to Christine Weil, deputy director of the office at the Foreign Ministry responsible for Poland, Kaczynski's discussions with German officials went better than expected. She said Kaczynski was particularly forthcoming in his meeting with President Koehler. During his meeting with Foreign Minister Steinmeier Kaczynski repeated his concerns about the Baltic Sea pipeline agreement signed last year between Russia and Germany, but his tone was more restrained than in the past. Weil said that Kaczynski mentioned the activities of the joint German-Poland working groups set up to address Polish concerns about the pipeline, and noted the theoretical possibility that Poland could draw gas from a branch of the pipeline.

¶4. (C) Michaela Kuchler, the desk officer at the Chancellery responsible for Polish affairs, said the atmosphere of Kaczynski's meeting with Chancellor Merkel was considerably better than when the two leaders met in Warsaw shortly after Merkel was elected. They continued to disagree on substance--Kaczynski made the argument that the EU constitution would not succeed, and repeated his concerns about the gas pipeline--but the two leaders spoke easily with each other. Kaczynski still expressed strong opposition to

creating a German center on World War II refugees as the CDU would like to do, but he expressed support for a multilateral European effort ("Netzwerk") to commemorate refugees. Netzwerk was supported by the previous Polish government, but Chancellery officials said they had not heard President Kaczynski support it before he visited Berlin.

Press Reaction

¶5. (C) Kaczynski expressed his views somewhat more combatively in newspaper interviews that appeared during the visit, and much of the German press was unimpressed with Kaczynski's performance. Coverage focused on Kaczynski's attitude toward the EU, which the Sueddeutsch Zeitung summed up as give nothing, receive much and be obstructionist. A number of commentators focused on a demonstration of gay rights activists that disrupted his speech at Humboldt University, because of Kaczynski's recent ban on a gay pride event in Warsaw, to underline what they argued were significant differences in German and Polish political culture.

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